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Food Aid and Security:
The Hunger Professionals' Dilemma

Core Course IV

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Seminar J
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Somali warlords dust off their "technicals" in the wake of departing United Nations peacekeepers. Hutu militias, sheltering in U.N. refugee camps, refit and rearm for yet another round of Rwandan genocide. All the warring parties in Bosnia openly manipulate aid workers for strategic advantage in the on-going land grabs. These are tough times for agencies committed to feeding the world's hungry, preventing famine, and protecting refugees. The measure of success is harder and harder to define. Is it mouths fed? Lives saved? What is the point if root causes are not addressed? If food is being used as a weapon, is providing food aid the same as providing arms?

Traditional views of world hunger that propelled the actions of global relief agencies are increasingly dysfunctional in the chaotic security environment of the post-Cold War world. The current crop of starving children are not random victims of drought or other "acts of God." They are not just starving, they are being starved. They are the targets of man-made famines, the victims of savage tribal and ethnic warfare. Those providing aid to the starving are finding that food alone is not enough. Without security--without lasting political solutions--food is just another weapon to sustain the conflicts and magnify the suffering.

If emerging realities show a direct connection between effective security and effective humanitarian aid, then the organizations that can enforce security and those that provide aid must learn to work together. And that is the rub. To a significant degree, international relief groups and the armies and security forces of the world operate with different world views--one focused on relieving human suffering regardless of cause, and the other devoted to protecting the security and interests of individual nation-states.

The aid givers and security providers contemplate each other across this ideological chasm with open suspicion and thinly veiled hostility. Nonetheless, global realities are driving them together. The following discussion will look at how these groups differ, the chaotic situation compelling their cooperation, and some suggestions for practical ways to further their common interests.

SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES

Every gun that is made, every warship
launched, every rocket fired signifies,
in the final sense, a theft from those
who hunger and are not fed, those who
are cold and not clothed.

(Dwight Eisenhower, Jan 20, 1953)

To many in the business of providing humanitarian aid, it seemed like such an easy equation. Trade weapons for food--bombers for development--war for peace. The end of the Cold War should have been the beginning of a new age of peace and economic prosperity in the developing world. With the collapse of the Soviet threat, the West had no proxy wars to fight, no security rationale for propping up vile dictatorships, and was theoretically flush with "peace dividend" cash. For international aid agencies the future looked bright for lasting solutions to the cycles of violence and famine in much of the world. A few short years later the picture is much more grim:

--Food is openly used as a weapon in Angola's interminable civil war. The Cold War backing is gone but the violence and hunger continue. ("Behind the Walls" 35)

--Bosnia's seemingly endless cycle of violence appears impervious to rational solutions. U.N. security zones and international aid are used flagrantly by all sides for advantage in the conflict. Whole populations are displaced not as an incidental result of war, but as

the primary purpose. (Rief 1-4)

--The world has abandoned Somalia to its fate. Since clan disputes are unresolved, there is no reason to expect that renewed genocide and mass starvation are far off. (Hoagland)

--In Sudan the use of enforced starvation as a weapon by both sides has resulted in staggering casualties--approaching one million dead so far--more than in either Bosnia or Somalia. ("The Sudan" 8)

--In Rwanda aid agencies are pulling out, frustrated by their inability to prevent Hutu militias from using the camps to consolidate power in preparation for renewed civil war. Another round of genocide and famine appears inevitable in this food sufficient country.

("Force" A12)

In many cases, aid agencies have been reduced to working with the thugs, a practice that ultimately promotes thuggery and sustains the suffering. Inevitably, the initial post-Cold War optimism has given way to a much more bleak assessment and a growing awareness of the need for political solutions and reliable security to make humanitarian aid effective. This reality poses a philosophical dilemma for many aid workers who have an ingrained distrust of violent solutions and military organizations.

THE HUNGER PROFESSIONALS

To a significant degree, international famine relief agencies are manned by a group which can be categorized as "hunger professionals"--a group focused on the issue of global hunger and with substantial agreement as to its causes and cures. Certainly this is a risky simplification, glossing over the broad range and diversity of organizations and individuals involved with distributing aid to the world's needy. However, two-dimensional as it is, the term has

utility in that it allows us to define areas of disagreement in philosophy, outlook, and approach between these hunger professionals and the security professionals on whom they are increasingly dependent. Only by highlighting the deeply entrenched divisions between the two groups, is it possible to divine the common ground which can lead to workable solutions in the interest of both. The following table lists some of the primary differences in goals, organization, and outlook separating hunger professionals and security professionals:

Hunger Professionals

Global orientation. Not confined by national borders.

Concerned about relieving suffering and inequality.

Loosely organized.

Slow response time and limited logistics capability.

Diverse funding including state, private, and international organizations.

A continuing mandate to relieve suffering.

Security Professionals

State oriented.

Concerned with protecting the state and its interests.

Strictly organized.

Rapid response. Good logistics.

State funded.

A shifting mandate depending on state interests and domestic opinion.

Clearly not all aid agencies are "loosely organized" nor all military organizations blessed with "good logistics." As a general proposition, however, this table helps clarify some of the core differences between these groups. As a framework for designing cooperative enterprises it is useful to note, for example, that response time can be shortened by including or copying military organizations, or that the hunger professionals' continuing mandate to relieve suffering can sustain an operation in the face of wavering domestic support for a military presence. To explore lucrative areas

of cooperation requires a closer look at how these institutional differences affect each group's response to evolving humanitarian and security missions and the resulting challenges for aid givers and military alike.

A DOCTRINAL DIVIDE

Food has always been used as a weapon, both in large scale nation against nation conflicts, and by sovereign powers to subdue internal opponents. In our own civil war, Sherman specifically targeted food production and storage as he marched through Georgia and the Carolinas. During the 1930's Stalin starved millions of peasants in the Ukraine and Kazakhstan in a joint program to suppress nationalism and collectivize agriculture. The phenomenon is not only not new, it is pervasive. Hunger professionals need to comprehend that famine is not simply a result of natural disaster nor the unfair distribution of global resources; it is often the intent and specific result of political decisions and actions--literally an act of war. In such instances the only effective solution is political, often requiring military force. (Hoagland)

In fairness, some aid providers have been instrumental in focusing global attention on the need for increased security in famine relief. Phillip Johnston, president of CARE, was the primary catalyst for galvanizing U.N. and U.S. support for the military intervention in Somalia. The hunger professionals were extremely well pleased initially with the security arrangements that resulted. However, when U.N. security forces attempted to forge a safer long term environment by disarming some armed factions, aid providers loudly condemned the resulting violence. ("Do-Gooder")

This basic aversion to violence is the crux of institutional

animosity between hunger professionals and security professionals. Military forces recognize that peace achieved at the end of a gun sometimes requires the gun to be used. This is deeply troubling to hunger professionals, especially since the result is seldom surgical. Given the confusing and brutal nature of currently raging ethnic conflicts, civilian casualties are an almost inevitable consequence of any overt use of force. (Mr. Aideed's gunmen sheltering behind women and children to ambush U.N. forces is a case in point). Many hunger professionals are unable to reconcile the moral dilemma of causing even a few innocent casualties in the interest of saving the multitude from starvation. Any cooperative arrangement between aid agencies and the military is bound to stumble often on this enduring philosophical disagreement.

A related issue is the doctrinal problem on how to use security forces to assist in the distribution of humanitarian aid. To the degree that they support any military intervention at all, many hunger professionals recognize a mainly passive military role focusing on logistical support, peacekeeping, and the creation of safe havens and security zones. Aid groups have given some support to the direct application of military power against the most vile aggressors, but even in this context, they have pressed for only limited and incremental measures to pressure combatants to accept the distribution of humanitarian aid to non-combatants. (Ruggie 29)

Hunger professionals have developed a certain comfort level with these limited manifestations of military force. Unfortunately, the record of success is dismal. In Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda safe havens and incremental methods did little to achieve any lasting solutions. Individual mouths have been fed, but the risk of mass

starvation is greater than ever (Hoagland). There is some evidence that humanitarian aid to the victims of ethnic warfare emboldens the weaker side to continue the conflict rather than seek political accommodation and convinces the aggressors of the need for even stronger methods.

From the military's viewpoint--and especially the U.S. military and its NATO counterparts--the use of incremental force is flawed doctrine. With memories of Viet Nam still vivid, they are wary of situations with murky goals and limited objectives. Incremental force has proven to have little effect on a committed foe, while creating substantial risks of both friendly casualties and civilian casualties caused by friendly fire. Much more than most aid agencies, the military are dependent on the vagaries of domestic politics and public opinion. Ever mindful of Viet Nam, they feel strongly that the prerequisites for military intervention are unambiguous goals, strong domestic support, and the ability to apply decisive force.

Clearly, there are disconnects in these two institutional viewpoints. The hunger professionals recognize the need for security in many humanitarian situations, but are uncomfortable with the consequences of forceful military intervention. The security professionals are wary of lukewarm commitments and they are dead set against the use of incremental force. The question remains, "Are there grounds for effective cooperation?"

COMMON GROUND

At a very basic level the hunger professionals and security professionals need each other in an increasingly interdependent world. Famine relief and development assistance contribute to a more stable and secure international system; yet, in the short term at least, firm

security measures are needed to control the forces of chaos and establish a foundation for development. The organizations that provide aid and those that provide security can each bring unique capabilities to this battle if applied in a coordinated and consistent fashion. But first, each side needs to make some accommodations.

Military organizations, and especially the U.S. military, need to move away from the "all or nothing" mindset. This post-Viet Nam doctrinal icon is a trap. Historically, few security threats have been so clear cut as to require massive military force and the current situation conforms to this reality. The use of limited force for limited political objectives is the much more likely near term need. The alternative, shunning all lower level commitments while training for a global war that never comes, is ultimately demoralizing--the military as "Palace Guards"--protecting the rich few while the world descends into chaos is a role that is morally repugnant and corrosive to public support and institutional health alike.

Security forces must recognize that the breakdown of the social and political fabric of the international system is a security threat. Ignoring the seeds of chaos will ultimately affect us all, unleashing forces that respect no political borders such as piracy, uncontrollable migration, environmental degradation, and nuclear proliferation. This does not mean that U.S. or NATO security forces should be used to police all the trouble spots in the world, but that military power, employed at key points to uphold international standards of conduct and relieve suffering, can help hold the system together. Logically, such intervention will be most effective if applied in concert with humanitarian relief and development aid in the interest of more permanent cures for underlying causes of conflict

For their part, the hunger professionals need to shed the moral straight jacket that limits their tolerance for violence and support for effective security measures. It is entirely disingenuous to demand security intervention and then to condemn any violence that results--to place military forces in harm's way without the tools to do the job. Resulting casualties accomplish little and make future cooperative enterprises even more difficult. If aid providers prove unable to support really effective military intervention, they are likely to become increasingly marginalized, operating on the fringes of the world's battlegrounds--compelled to deal with the thugs and limited in their ability to end the suffering. Angola and Rwanda are stark examples of this vision of the future.

Finally, there is common ground in the backing and expectations of U.S. and European populations. There is broad popular support for humanitarian aid in general, especially famine relief. Contrary to recent dogma there is also majority support for the use of military force in humanitarian situations and even substantial tolerance for casualties with one important caveat--the public is not afraid to lose soldiers, but only if there is tangible success in the mission at hand. Lives wasted in ill-conceived missions with nebulous goals will likely end an operation and make future commitments even more difficult. ("Who Will Fight")

It is clear that despite substantial differences in institutional structure and outlook between the hunger professionals and security professionals, they share a large area of overlap in basic goals--establishing a healthy, peaceful, and secure global environment. Recognizing this common purpose, what are some specific areas of cooperation and tangible actions that can capitalize on the unique

characteristic of each group?

COOPERATIVE MEASURES

It is important to note that cooperation between aid agencies and the military is not a totally new concept. To a degree, in various ad hoc lash-ups, this has been going on for some time--most recently in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda--though with questionable success. What has been missing is a systematic approach to forge the two cultures into a common instrument for real and lasting change. With that in mind, here are some specific proposals for effective cooperation:

1) Capture the lessons learned from failed operations. In what instances did aid programs negatively affect security needs? Did certain security measures undermine the effectiveness of aid programs? We have a good feel for what does not work; it would pay to not repeat recent mistakes.

2) One of the most lucrative areas for cooperation is the sharing of intelligence. Aid agencies and security agencies have separate and complimentary mechanisms for anticipating and reacting to crisis. There is substantial evidence that early security intervention can prevent some of the worst excesses of ethnic strife, before serious humanitarian emergencies develop. Anticipating these opportunities depends heavily on shared intelligence.

3) Joint planning has great potential for improving all aspects of cooperation including initial response, logistics, security measures, and maintaining a consistent, non-contradictory approach throughout an operation. With advance planning aid agencies and security forces can work together where appropriate and avoid areas of conflict and overlap.

4) Logistics is a key area of cooperation now done on a largely

ad hoc basis. Designated military lift assets, compatible systems and equipment, familiarity with hardware and techniques, and even joint training in advance of contingencies could all make humanitarian missions more efficient.

5) Command and Control are important to all military operations, but much more decentralized in aid programs. Using military systems and techniques to control humanitarian operations has potential to increase overall efficiency dramatically.

6) The ideological gulf between hunger professionals and security professionals can be bridged in part by shared participation in events and programs that deal with philosophy and policy formulation. For example, by sending military representatives to conferences on famine relief, and by including aid workers as students and faculty in advanced military schools and war colleges. The intent would be not only to foster better understanding between the two cultures, but to work toward compatible doctrines for intervention in humanitarian missions.

These proposals barely scratch the surface of possible cooperation between the hunger professionals and security professionals. If both groups can get past the initial hurdles of mutual suspicion--abandoning stereotypes of "warmongers" and "fuzzy one-worlders"--to look hard at the realities of the link between famine and security, the potential for successful cooperation is boundless. Perhaps each side finds more comfort in clear cut missions, such as ejecting Iraqi forces from Kuwait or feeding the victims of drought in the Sahel, but when armed groups use food as a weapon and starvation as a goal, there is no other choice than to fight the battle shoulder to shoulder.